

Space Telescopes

The science of astronomy depends on modern-day temples called telescopes. Astronomers make pilgrimages to remote mountaintops where these large, intricate, precise machines gather light that rains down from the Universe. But, since Earth is a bright, turbulent planet, our finest telescopes are those that have been launched into the dark stillness of space. These space telescopes, named after heroes of astronomy (Hubble, Chandra, Spitzer, Herschel), are some of the best ideas our species has ever had. They show us, over 13 billion years of cosmic history, how galaxies and quasars evolve. They study planets orbiting other stars. They've helped us determine that 95% of the Universe is of unknown composition. In short, they tell us about our place in the Universe. The next step in this journey is the James Webb Space Telescope, being built by NASA, Europe, and Canada for a 2018 launch; Webb will reveal the first galaxies that ever formed.